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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 3500 SECTION 1 OF 2

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IT

SUBJECT: UGO LA MALFA AND THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE

REF: ROME 3393

SUMMARY: RECENT REMARKS BY COLORFUL AND INFLUENTIAL REPUBLICAN PARTY LEADER UGO LA MALFA HAVE FOCUSSED ATTENTION ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE COMMUNIST PROPOSED HISTORIC COMPROMISE TO ITALY'S INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT, AND RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT LA MALFA'S ATTITUDE TOWARD IT. LA MALFA, DESPITE HIS OWN PARTY'S CLEAR OPPOSITION TO THE COMPROMISE, HAS IMPOSED A WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE ON THE PRI UNTIL AFTER THE IMPORTANT JUNE REGIONAL ELECTIONS. ONLY AFTER THE DC HAS MADE ITS CHOICE BETWEEN WHAT LA MALFA SEES AS AN INEVITABLE DC CHOICE BETWEEN THE COMMUNISTS AND THE SOCIALISTS, WILL THE PRI DRAW ITS OWN CONCLUSIONS. LA MALFA HAS A HIGH RESPECT FOR THE PCI'S "PROCESS OF IDEOLOGICAL REVISION," AND SEEMS TO CREDIT IT WITH A DESIRE TO LIBERATE ITSELF FROM SOVIET INFLUENCE. HE BELIEVES THAT A SHIFT IN THE EUROPEAN BALANCE OF POWER IN FAVOR OF THE SOVIET UNION HAS OCCURED AND SEES THIS AS A THREAT BOTH TO ITALIAN INDEPENDENCE AND ALSO TO WHAT HE APPARENTLY VIEWS AS THE IDEAL SOLUTION TO THE INTERNAL COMMUNIST PROBLEM; I.E., ITS "SOCIALDEMOCRATIZATION" AND ACQUISITION OF COMPLETE AUTONOMY FROM THE USSR.

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END SUMMARY.

1. THE ONGOING NATIONAL DEBATE CONCERNING THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE HAS FOCUSED DURING THE LAST TWO WEEKS ON THE VIEWS OF THE COLORFUL REPUBLICAN PARTY LEADER, UGO LA MALFA. IN REMARKS TO FOREIGN JOURNALISTS ON FEBRUARY 20, LA MALFA STATED THAT THE "COMPROMISE" MUST BE VIEWED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT, WHICH, IN HIS VIEW, HAD REGISTERED A SHIFT IN FAVOR OF THE SOVIET UNION AS A RESULT OF THE OIL CRISIS. LA MALFA ADDED THAT, AFTER THE IMPORTANT JUNE REGIONAL ELECTIONS THE DC WOULD FACE A CHOICE BETWEEN THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE WITH THE COMMUNISTS (PCI), AND A PREFERENTIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOCIALISTS (PSI); AND IN ANTICIPATION OF IT HE WAS ASKING HIS OWN REPUBLICAN PARTY (PRI) TO GIVE THE PARTY LEADERSHIP A FREE HAND TO DETERMINE THE PRI'S POLITICAL ALLIANCES AFTER THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS. THESE VIEWS, TOGETHER WITH HIS OPEN PRAISE FOR THE PCI'S "PROCESS OF IDEOLOGICAL REVISION" (CONTRASTED WITH WHAT HE SAW AS LESS LAUDABLE PROGRESS BY THE DC AND PSI IN REVISING THEIR POSITIONS), GAVE LA MALFA'S LIBERAL AND SOCIAL DEMOCRAT CRITICS REASON TO CHARGE THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE.

2. LA MALFA'S HYPERSENSITIVE REACTIONS TO SUCH INTERPRETATIONS, AND HIS REFUSAL TO CLARIFY HIS VIEWS BEYOND REFERRING CRITICS TO HIS PREPUBLISHED ADDRESS TO THE PRI'S NATIONAL CONGRESS (FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 2), INSURED THAT THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE WOULD DOMINATE THE CONGRESS.

3. AT THE CONGRESS SPEECHES BY ALL THE PARTY'S OTHER INFLUENTIAL LEADERS ADDED UP TO A RESOUNDING CONDEMNATION OF THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE. HOWEVER, LA MALFA'S DOMINATING PERSONALITY COMPELLED HIS FOLLOWERS TO FORMULATE THEIR UNAMBIGUOUS REJECTION OF THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE AS DEFENSES OF LA MALFA'S OWN VIEWS. IN THEIR STATEMENTS THEY ADDUCED LA MALFA'S INSISTENCE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION AS THE MOST DECISIVE ARGUMENT AGAINST THE COMPROMISE. HIS PARTY'S VIEWS WERE THEN IMPLICITLY ENDORSED BY LA MALFA HIMSELF IN HIS CLOSING REMARKS.

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4. THE PCI WAS OPENLY PLEASED WITH LA MALFA'S POSITION, AND WAS QUICK TO PRAISE HIS "NON-PREJUDICIAL" APPROACH, WHILE DEFENDING HIM FROM HIS ANTI-COMMUNIST CRITICS. DC SECRETARY FANFANI AND EX PRESIDENT SARAGAT, ON THE OTHER HAND, CHOSE TO INTERPRET LA MALFA'S VIEWS AS HIS CONGRESS DID. SARAGAT COMPARES LA MALFA'S "REJECTION" OF THE COMPROMISE TO WILLY BRANDT'S "REJECTION" OF THE GOAL OF GERMAN UNIFICATION;

I.E., A CONSIGNMENT OF UNIFICATION TO HISTORY, TO A TIME
WHEN HISTORY WILL "WILL" IT.

5. COMMENT: BY GIVING PRIORITY TO INTERNATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS, LA MALFA HAS PROBABLY HELPED THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE COMPROMISE RATHER THAN THOSE WHO FAVOR IT. THE ARGUMENT OF THE LATTER, INCLUDING THE PCI ITSELF, HAS BEEN TO MINIMIZE THE POTENTIAL INTERNATIONAL COMPLICATIONS OF THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE FOR ITALY. IT HAS LONG BEEN LA MALFA'S VIEW THAT INTERNATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS RULED OUT THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE.

6. MEANWHILE POLEMICS ON LA MALFA'S POSITION CONTINUE. THE OPEN-ENDED FORMULATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL PLANK IN HIS PARTY'S PLATFORM, WHICH MAKES THE CORRECT EVALUATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THE PRI'S ELECGORAL CAMPAIGN, ATTESTS TO HIS PERSISTING "ATTENDISMO," HIS REFUSAL TO EXCLUDE NOW ANY OPTION FOR HIS PARTY AFTER THE ELECTIONS.

7. LA MALFA OF COURSE HAS ALWAYS TAKEN PRIDE IN AN INTELLECTUAL, NON-PREJUDICIAL APPROACH TO ANY QUESTION.

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